

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 INR-05 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSC-05

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1868

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 TUNIS 5108

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR TS

SUBJ: POLITICAL BUREAU STUDYING RECOGNITION OF SOCIAL DEMOCRATS

1. SUMMARY: AFTER RECEIVING HIS PROMISE THAT OUR CONVERSATION WOULD NEVER BE REVEALED OR REPEATED I TOLD DRISS GUIGA, PSD POLITICAL BUREAU AND CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEMBER, I HOPED THE GOT WOULD AGREE TO RECOGNIZE THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (MDS) AS A POLITICAL PARTY IN TIME FOR THE 9179 ELECTIONS. GUIGA, WHILE FAVORABLY DISPOSED, EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT SUCH A DECISION COULD LEAD TO AN ANARCHIC MULTI-PARTY SYSTEM. I TOLD HIM OF A FORMULA TO AVOID THAT WHICH A FELLOW BUREAU MEMBER HAD ALREADY CONCEIVED. GUIGA QUESTIONED OUR LATEST INFORMATION THAT PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA LEANS TOWARD GRANTING THE MDS APPLICATION TO FUNCTION AS A PARTY. END SUMMARY.

2. DRISS GUIGA, CURRENTLY TUNISIAN AMBASSADOR TO FRG, FORMER MINISTER AND STILL MEMBER OF THE DESTOURIAN
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SOCIALIST PARTY'S POLITICAL BUREAU, TOOK ME ASIDE AT A DINNER PARTY JULY 16 AND TOLD ME THAT ON JULY 20 THE POLITICAL BUREAU WOULD DEBATE THE QUESTION OF GRANTING A PERMIT TO THE MOVEMENT DU DEMOCRATES SOCIALISTES (MDS), TO FUNCTION AS A POLITICAL PARTY. HE SAID HE WAS WRESTLING WITH HIS CONSCIENCE ABOUT HIS VOTE AND WOULD VALUE MY OPINION AND ADVICE. I TOLD HIM THAT, AS AN AMBASSADOR

HIMSELF, HE WOULD APPRECIATE THAT I WOULD NOT DARE TO INVOLVE MYSELF IN TUNISIAN DOMESTIC POLITICS TO THE POINT OF GIVING ADVICE ON SO DELICATE AND CRITICAL AND ISSUE. HE SAID HE COULD FULLY APPRECIATE ALL THAT, BUT HE WAS PUTTING HIS REQUEST TO ME AS "MAN TO MAN", AS A PERSONAL FRIEND OF MORE THAN TEN YEARS STANDING AND NOT AT ALL AS THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR. I SAID THAT I COULD TELL HIM HONESTLY THAT MY GOVERNMENT HAS EXPRESSED NO POINT OF VIEW ON THIS ISSUE AND CHARACTERISTICALLY WOULD NOT DO SO. ANYTHING I HAD TO SAY WOULD REPRESENT MY PURELY PERSONAL OPINION AND WOULD BE GIVEN TO HIM ON A FRIEND-TO-FRIEND BASIS. HE SAID THAT WAS UNDERSTOOD AND THAT MY VIEWS WOULD NEVER BE REPEATED BY HIM TO ANYONE ELSE.

3. ON THAT UNDERSTANDING, I TOLD GUIGA THAT THERE WAS NO QUESTION IN MY MIND WHAT THE POLITICAL BUREAU'S DECISION SHOULD BE: THE MDS SHOULD BE QUICKLY RECOGNIZED AS A POLITICAL PARTY BECAUSE TO DO OTHERWISE WOULD (A) BE CONTRARY TO THE TUNISIAN CONSTITUTION AND (B) DEAL A VERY SERIOUS BLOW TO TUNISIA'S IMAGE AND PRESTIGE ABROAD, PARTICULARLY AMONG HER MOST RELIABLE FRIENDS IN THE WEST. FURTHERMORE, I SAID, IT WAS CLEAR TO ME THAT THE PSD COULD NOT HAVE A "BETTER" OPPOSITION. FROM THE EMBASSY'S MANY CONTACTS WITH THE MDS I WAS CONVINCED OF THEIR MODERATE AND CONSTRUCTIVE PROGRAM. THEY ARE, IN MY OPINION, I TOLD HIM, "PART OF THE TUNISIAN ESTABLISHMENT" AND AT CONFIDENTIAL

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LEAST AS INTERESTED AS THE PSD IS IN PREVENTING THE DE-STABILIZATION OF THE SYSTEM HERE. I ADMITTED TO HAVING SUGGESTED ONCE TO ONE OF HIS POLITICAL BUREAU COLLEAGUES (BOURGUIBA JR., WHOM I DID NOT NAME) THE WISDOM OF ENCOURAGING, EVEN SUBSIDIZING, THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS AS A LOYAL OPPOSITION PARTY. ANOTHER POLITICAL BUREAU MEMBER, I SAID, HAD CONVINCED ME OF THE WISDOM OF HAVING THE MDS AS AN OPPOSITION BECAUSE IN TIMES OF CRISIS THEY COULD PRODUCE A NUMBER OF EXPERIENCED EX-MINISTERS TO HELP STAFF A "GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY".

4. WHEN I HAD GONE THAT FAR AMBASSADOR GUIGA SAID, "YES, YES; I AM WITH YOU ON ALL OF THAT". HIS PROBLEM WAS A DIFFERENT ONE, HE SAID; UNDOUBTEDLY TUNISIA IS MATURE ENOUGH FOR A TWO-PARTY SYSTEM, BUT, FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE, ITS USUAL POLITICAL MODEL IS FRANCE, WHICH HAS A WIDELY PLURALISTIC PARTY SYSTEM. HOW, HE ASKED, COULD YOU LET THE MDS REGISTER AS A POLITICAL PARTY AND DENY THE SAME PRIVILEGE TO FIVE OR SIX OTHER GROUPS WHO WOULD INEVITABLY WANT TO BE INCORPORATED? I SAID THAT I WAS SURE, IF PROPERLY HANDLED, A FORMULA COULD BE FOUND.

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AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 TUNIS 5108

LIMDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

I MENTIONED THE STRATAGEM SUGGESTED BY ANOTHER FRIEND OF
MINE WHOM I DID NOT NAME (TUNIS 4583 NOTAL) WHEREBY THE
GOT WOULD ANNOUNCE THE RECOGNITION OF MDS AND COUPLE IT
WITH THE LAUNCHING OF AN EXPERIMENT IN LEGISLATIVE
PLURALISM. THERE COULD BE TWO STAGES: TWO PARTIES ONLY
WOULD CONTEST THE 1979 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. IF THE
EXPERIMENT SUCCEEDED THE 1984 ELECTIONS COULD BE CONTESTED
BY ALL PARTIES WHO MET A STANDARD OF SO MANY MEMBERS OR
WHO COULD POLL FIVE PERCENT OF THE VOTE. ANY SUCH FORMULA
COULD BE STUDIED, I SAID, ALTHOUGH I DECLINED ESPOUSING
ANY. I SUGGESTED HE TALK TO OTHER MEMBERS OF THE POLITICAL
BUREAU, MANY OF WHOM HAD PROBABLY CONCOCTED OTHER POSSIBLE
FORMULAS BY NOW. GUIGA EXPECTED THAT THE PROPONENTS OF
PLURALISM IN THE BUREAU WOULD PROBABLY PUT THEM
FORWARD ON THE 20TH. I SAID PERHAPS MANY OF THEM
COULD IF THEY KNEW IN ADVANCE THAT THE MAJORITY WERE
LEANING TOWARD A POLICY OF PLURALISM.

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5. NEXT I TOLD AMBASSADOR GUIGA THAT I HAD CONFLICTING REPORTS OF PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA'S ATTITUDE. A FEW WEEKS AGO (TUNIS 4583 NOTAL) HE WAS ALLEGED TO BE ADAMANT AGAINST MDS RECOGNITION, BUT AHMED MESTIRI HAD TOLD ME THAT PAST WEEK (TUNIS 5056NOTAL) THAT HE HAD GOOD GROUNDS FOR BELIEVING THE PRESIDENT WAS NOW CLOSE TO A FAVORABLE STANCE. GUIGA SAID HE FOUND IT HARD TO BELIEVE THAT BOURGUIBA WOULD EVER GO ALONG WITH IT. THEN HE MUSED THAT PERHAPS, JUST PERHAPS, ALL PARTIES COULD BE MADE TO AGREE THAT BOURGUIBA WOULD BE "UNTOUCABLE" FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE AND WOULD KEEP HIS POWER TO NAME HIS PRIME MINISTER (WHO BECOMES HIS SUCCESSOR UNDER THE CONSTITUTION). HE THOUGHT HE MIGHT ADVANCE THAT IDEA IN THE POLITICAL BUREAU. I SUGGESTED HE TALK HIS IDEA OVER WITH ONE OF THE MDS LEADERS BECAUSE I SUSPECTED THEY WOULD READILY AGREE TO IT. HE SAID HE MIGHT JUST DO THAT. HE ALSO TOLD ME HE WOULD TRY TO SEE ME AGAIN BEFORE GOING BACK TO BONN IN EARLY AUGUST TO LET ME KNOW HOW THINGS WERE GOING. HE AGREED AGAIN TO MENTION OUR CONVERSATION TO NO ONE.

8. COMMENT: I HOPE THE DEPARTMENT WILL AGREE THAT THE OPINIONS AND SUGGESTIONS I EXPRESSED IN THIS INSTANCE TO DRISS GUIGA WERE NOT ULTRA VIRES. I FRANKLY FELT (A) FLATTERED TO HAVE MY OPINION SOUGHT ON SO CRITICAL A TUNISIAN ISSUE BY ONE OF THE PSD'S LEADING POLITICAL FIGURES AND (B) EAGER TO GIVE DESTOURIAN POLICY A NUDGE ALONG THE ROAD TO FURTHER DEMOCRATIZATION.

7. GUIGA, IT SHOULD BE RECALLED, TOOK THE BONN AMBASSADORSHIP ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO AS A CONVENIENT SHELF AFTER A STRIFE-TORN, RIOT-RIDDEN STINT AS MINISTER OF EDUCATION. HIS EFFORTS TO PACIFY THE STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY
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WERE UNSUCCESSFUL. HE DID, HOWEVER, PUT TOGETHER THE EXCELLENT MERIT SYSTEM OF UNIVERSITY ADMISSIONS WHICH HIS SUCCESSOR, MOHAMED MZALI, ANNOUNCED AND FOR WHICH THE LATTER RECEIVES THE CREDIT. GUIGA CONFIRMED TO ME A FEW DAYS BEFORE THIS MEETING RUMORS WE HAD RECEIVED THAT HE HAS TWICE IN THE PAST SEVEN OR EIGHT MONTHS DECLINED GOT'S REQUEST THAT HE RETURN TO THE CABINET AS INTERIOR MINISTER.
MULCAHY

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